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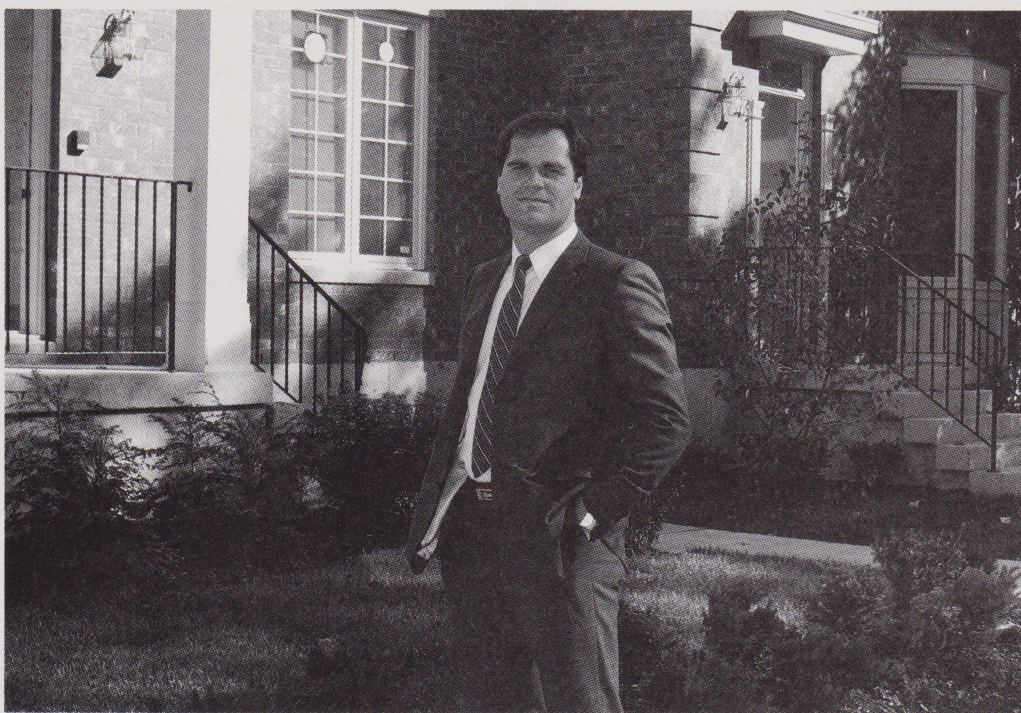
Style

A new wave of condos

PHOTO BY JOHN DAVIS



CITY Style



JOHN DAVIS

Peter Ryan has faith in the potential of condos

Condominium Fever

The developers have produced pockets of sophisticated living space in metro. Are the buyers there?

by Deborah Jones

Peter Ryan, a friendly straight-talker with rugged good looks who could pass for a professional football player, is a young entrepreneur intent on introducing contemporary downtown condo living to local yuppies and empty nesters. Ryan does not live in a condominium. He resides in a detached house in a new Halifax subdivision with his wife and children, citing the need for lots of room for growing kids as his reason. But choice of homes aside, Ryan is likely metro's most enthusiastic booster of the no-hassle condominium lifestyle. His ardor is well placed: his company has built many of the new wave of condos in downtown Halifax, and the desks in his Spring Garden Road offices overflow with schemes for more.

Sipping a tall cool Perrier and pointing to a rendering of Ryco Atlantic Ltd.'s project, a combination retail and 150-unit condominium project near the

Halifax waterfront, Ryan says he's been involved in local condominium sales and construction for more than a decade. He retained his faith in their potential despite losing more than \$150,000 on his first project, built with a partner near Bedford's yacht club about ten years ago.

Following that fiasco, Ryan sold for Atlantic Trust for several years before venturing into another development of his own — 44-unit Oxford Court — with about 20 private investors. That project "was like jumping on a snowball going down a hill, that just kept going and going," he reflects, estimating that Ryco, since its incorporation in 1982, has built \$24 million worth of condominiums in the city, including most recently Carriage Lane on the South End Oland's Castle property.

A condominium is a jointly-owned complex of housing units, with designated common facilities as well as

individual homes. Under the provincial Condominiums Property Act, the condo has to be registered and is administered by an elected board of directors of owners. Common property, ranging from building exteriors to lawns and tennis courts, docks and swimming pools, is managed by the board and financed out of condo fees paid by each occupant. Residents are responsible for their own interiors.

Depending on price-range, location and style, say Ryan and other condo developers, downtown condos appeal to: established, semi-retired peninsula residents who want to sell large older homes but remain in the area; upscale "young executives or young professionals with families"; and, for the lower-priced units, young professionals starting out or white collar workers who don't want to mow lawns.

Ryco is not metro's first new condo builder by a long shot. Clayton Realty

Ltd., which built or managed about 500 mainly town house condos in the Clayton Park subdivision through the 1970s, claims that title. Nor is Ryco the only company specializing in downtown condos with choice central locations — other well-publicized projects include United Equities' Summer Gardens on Spring Garden Road, Admiralty Place in Dartmouth and the financially-troubled Jubilee on the Northwest Arm. Extensions to Quinpool Court and a residential condo phase of the Brewery complex are also in the works.

But Ryco, which espouses the sophisticated condo lifestyle that's caught on in other cities, is perhaps the best example of the new breed of developers who have hooked onto condos as a way to break into local development. There's a lot of them right now, selling condos priced anywhere between about \$70,000 and \$500,000 and mostly from \$140,000 to \$220,000. Judging by the slow sales in some projects, most notably the high-priced Jubilee and the spanking new Admiralty Place and Carriage Lane projects, some are finding the market as soft as a chocolate parfait.

An adolescent in North America's continental love affair with condos, metro seems to be in one big hurry to catch up with the trend in other cities. Of all types of new homes under construction locally, apartment condominiums are the most prolific, according to a Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation official. "There are a little over 2,000 condo units in marketing, planning or building through 1985-86 — an unprecedented burst of activity," says Wilson Fitt, who predicts that unsold condos will soon spill over into the rental market. "It comes to 25 per cent of new housing starts."

"There is a proliferation in condominiums," notes Richard Miller of Clayton Developments, who is also an officer of the Housing and Urban Development Association of Canada. "The marketplace seems to have more than an abundance of supply in Halifax and Dartmouth. And they are still building them."

Many in the real estate business attribute the condo activity to a situation which on the surface seems unrelated: rent controls instituted by Ottawa in the mid 70s and continued by the provincial government. Despite apartment vacancy rates of less than one per cent in central metro and a desperate need for low to middle-range priced units, interest in apartment construction is lukewarm.

"Rent controls are one of the major reasons . . . that much of the construction industry has left the rental market," says Patrick Simms, executive director

of the Investment Property Owners Association. "The plain fact of life is that construction people can make more money by making condominiums than they can by making apartment buildings. Rent controls restrict investors' long term capabilities of getting a good return." Others add that building condos and renting them for three years is one way to get around rent controls.

Slightly bemused by the rush to build condos, quick to point to the ones in difficulty and in the cases of the successful projects perhaps a wee bit jealous, established industry spokesmen point to the foibles of condo fever. Condominiums were an invention of the Romans who designed them to pack slaves in a minimum of space, claims one businessman.

Simms, whose organization represents rental property owners, notes that condos "are not a quick fire method of making money" for small investors, many of whom have bought one or two established condo units to rent out. The initial cost, condo fees and taxes bring the buyer "pretty close to the break even point. . . it takes years before your investment bears fruit."

But for the homeowner who knows what he or she wants and sets out to buy a condo, it can be a good deal. Ralph Morgan, a retired engineer, is president of the board of directors of Convoy

Estates, a 132-unit North End condo. "I bought my apartment 10 years ago for \$37,000, and I believe I could sell it now for \$110,000." He says the condo concept originally appealed to him "because I could buy for less than a house and I would live on the peninsula. . . I liked the idea, I thought it was a thing of the future. The big thing about condos is that you have gardeners and people who remove the snow for you. You're not obliged to do any manual work."

Morgan notes expensive structural problems with Convoy Estates several years ago required careful planning and financing to overcome, but "we're fortunate in that we've had quite a few accountants, bankers, engineers, lawyers and so on here. We've always had a very competent board who served for nothing." But he adds that condo living requires a great deal of cooperation among owners and a solid set of ground rules. "People who were their own bosses have to learn community involvement and they've got to play by the rules."

A Halifax lawyer who handles mostly real estate business says consumers have experienced few problems with buying condos in metro. But, he adds, like any other type of purchase, the Latin adage "caveat emptor," or let the buyer beware, applies. **C**

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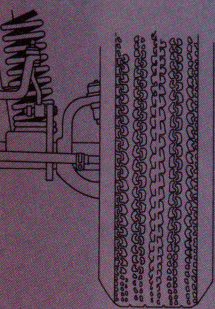
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NIGHTLIFE

A Greek empire comes downtown

Meet Terris Panagiotakos and his brothers, creators of the city's best-known entertainment spots

by Francis Moran

The lunchtime crowd at the new pub in the old Zellers Building is lining up at the buffet counter. Most seats are already filled. Open only a few months, Secretary's is already a very popular place.

A couple enter, view the crowds and turn back towards the door to find a less crowded venue for their lunch. But before they can leave they're stopped by a tallish man with dark curly hair. Quietly and politely, he turns the couple back from the door, leads them to a pair of empty stools at the bar, takes their order and brings them their food and drinks.

The man is 42-year old Terris Panagiotakos, and he performs this personal service to keep customers in dozens of times during lunch. It's hands-on management — and it has made him and two of his brothers the rulers of Halifax's largest and most prominent entertainment empire. Their holdings, collected under the company name Marathon Grill Ltd., take in the city's two largest nightclubs, a pub and other establishments plus large chunks of prime real estate, including the City Club building on Barrington Street and a strategic corner lot on Spring Garden Road.

Tucked in a corner of Secretary's as another hectic lunch hour approaches, Panagiotakos agrees that he and his brothers, Andy, 38, and Peter, 45, have come a long way from the Greek seaport of Gytheion where they grew up. Emigrating to Halifax in 1961 "because we already had relatives here," the three paid \$10,000 for the old Ardmore Tea Room on Gottingen Street and opened their first establishment there, the Marathon Grill.

"That started as a small lunch

counter," Panagiotakos recalls. It had seating for only about two dozen customers at a time, but when they left Gottingen Street the establishment had grown to a complex for more than 1,000 people.

At the time, the decision to take a small grill in a declining neighborhood and turn it into a huge cabaret on the same site might have seemed a trifle foolhardy. But it worked. The Misty Moon rose over Gottingen Street in 1974 and quickly became a showcase for top-notch Canadian and international talent as well as a solid proving ground for local acts. In the early days, the brothers would let hot new groups play the Misty Moon for the door receipts only. It was a simple philosophy, says Terris. "When you work and sweat, you're looking for some kind of reward. In this case, it was up to the bands — the more they sweated, the more they made." It was a deal that several local musicians, such as Cape Breton rock and rollers Matt Minglewood and Sam Moon, credit for giving them their first good exposure.

But as the reputation of the Misty Moon kept going up, the reputation of the street it was on kept going down and the brothers started looking for a classier neighborhood. A natural seemed to be the corner of Spring Garden Road and Queen Street, a lot which the brothers had shrewdly snapped up earlier. But the merchants of Halifax's pre-eminent shopping area frowned on the idea of a rock and roll cabaret beside them and the move was blocked.

Finally, in 1980, an empty warehouse in the north end became the home for the Misty Moon, the New Moon, as it was quickly dubbed. With acts like Rough Trade, Doug and the Slugs and others, the massive warehouse thrived.

In 1981 the family business expanded when the brothers bought the troubled Palace Cabaret. The glitzy nightclub, modelled after posh Las Vegas rooms, had a bumpy history, finally ending up in the hands of Dartmouth businessman

Donald Valardo. He sold it to the three brothers and Marathon Grill Ltd. was downtown at last.

But the Misty Moon was still the flagship and a downtown location for that was still being pursued when Zellers announced it was closing its ancient store on the corner of Barrington and Sackville streets. The Panagiotakos brothers bought the old building and applied for a license to move the Misty Moon there.

The same opposition arose anew: merchants and other businesses worried about having a late-night drinking establishment so close. They told the Nova Scotia Liquor Licensing Board that they were afraid of potential damage to local businesses caused by rowdy drunks. But the brothers had established a solid reputation with the board over the years and they won approval. Last summer, the Misty Moon was again relocated, this time in a superb spot. Secretary's, a traditional pub featuring good, cheap food and occasional live entertainment, was added in the basement of the Zellers building.

"The opening of the Misty Moon downtown has proven the opposition to be wrong," Terris Panagiotakos says. "Hopefully, this will disarm any future opposition if we decide to expand more."

Expansion is in fact in the works for Panagiotakos, who says that "when a person stops wanting to do more, you might as well open the grave for him." There are plans for developing the City Club property but Panagiotakos says the brothers are uncertain whether to open some sort of eatery there themselves or rent it out. Their warehouse on Kempt Road, the old New Moon, is now a labor temple that houses a dozen or more unions. And there's still that prime chunk of Spring Garden Road.

Panagiotakos was reluctant to be interviewed and adamant about not having his picture taken. But neither he nor his brothers have ever been shy about pursuing their business plans. "One thing I don't do is stand still," he says. **C**

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CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD

By Mark Medoff

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TICKETS NOW ON SALE

First impressions of an English chef

by Deborah Draper

Today in North American dining, first impressions are number one," says chef Mark Rimmington of Le Rendez Vous Café in Dartmouth. To create such impressions, he says, presentation, flavor, and catering to the customer are essential. "I want those dining in our restaurant to feel they've had a high quality experience."

Presentation is important to Rimmington. "A terribly presented meal turns you off psychologically even if it does taste good," he says. "I like my art. If I can't feel good about what I'm serving, I'm not happy. It has to be at its best and the waitresses have to be proud to serve it."

Rimmington, 27, a native of Leicester, England has been a chef in Canada for 11 years, but began cooking at the age of eight under the watchful eye of his mother, a caterer. He says that cooking appeals to the creative side of his nature. He enjoys experimenting with garnishes, producing zucchini flower pots that sprout daisies carved from turnips. Or he presents chocolate cheesecake alongside waves of chocolate under whipped cream boats with mint leaf sails.

This creative bent carries to every aspect of his cooking. "It must start," he says, "with fresh herbs whenever possible." The aroma of dill and bayleaf are common kitchen scents. He believes that herbs should be used not to overpower but to enhance and bring out the natural flavor of foods. "If there's not much flavor in a food then I like to improve it. Such as a boiled potato. I cook it with just a touch of salt, adding bay leaf and onion to the water." The result is a fresher, cooler taste to this otherwise ordinary item.

Constantly experimenting in the kitchen, Rimmington always searches for new meals such as ham and Dijon fettucini or leek and potato soup. "I like developing new twists to food experiences, adding ham and Dijon mustard to fettucini is a break from the traditional fettucini noodles."

Not as familiar to Canadians, leeks are a very European food and in France are known as 'the asparagus of the poor'.

They look much like a giant spring onion but have their own unique, mild flavor. Rimmington adds that leeks are expensive and often hard to find in the winter months, but they're worth trying. He says he can usually buy them through Willet's Cash and Carry in Halifax and seasonally at the Farmers Market.

Whenever he can, Rimmington experiments at home. "My apartment is well stocked with cooking equipment. So I spend my spare time creating new dishes and trying them out on some of my friends who invite me into their homes to cook for them."

Rimmington is also in the process of writing a Canadian cookbook. "I hope to have the book finished in about two years. It will be aimed at the European market — to show what cooking is like over here. Back home you don't hear much about Canadian cooking, but here we get bombarded with European cooking. My father is an educational publisher in England, so I hope to publish it through him."



Rimmington: a creative bent

Rimmington establishes his menus himself and keeps them simple but versatile. Despite the connotation of the name, "Le Rendez Vous", Rimmington says it's not a French restaurant. "We offer a variety of dishes — from Italian, French and Canadian to traditionally English. The atmosphere is French in the sense that it is small, quiet and intimate.

And I'm not a temperamental chef." In fact, Mark Rimmington is a rather low-key individual — a man of few words who at the young age of 27 is well established in his career.

Ham and Dijon Fettucini

6 oz. cooked fettucini noodles
3 oz. whipping cream (unwhipped)
1 tbsp. Dijon mustard
1 tbsp. parmesan cheese
1 tbsp. chopped chives
2 oz. chopped ham
salt & pepper to season

Blend whipping cream and mustard over medium heat. Add ham, cheese, and chives and mix together. Let simmer but not boil. Add cooked noodles. Fold together gently. Season with salt and pepper.

Garnish with parmesan cheese and fresh parsley. Serves 1.

Chocolate Strawberry Cheesecake

Base

2 cups chocolate graham wafer crumbs
1/3 cup melted butter
1/3 cup brown sugar
1/2 tsp. cinnamon

Mix together and form in 9" spring-form pan.

Filling

5 eggs
1 cup sugar
2 tbs. flour
2 ozs. soft cream cheese
1 cup sour cream
1 cup strawberries

Blend all ingredients together in food processor and pour over base. Bake for 1 hour at 350 F. then leave in oven for 1 hour with oven off. Take out and cool.

Topping

1 egg
4 oz. semi-sweet chocolate

Melt chocolate over double boiler. Quickly whip egg into melted chocolate. Spread over cooled cheesecake and refrigerate. Garnish with fresh strawberries and whipped cream.

To create chocolate waves, drop a teaspoon of any chocolate syrup on a plate. Take a knife and drag it through the chocolate, swirling it in a counter-clockwise fashion. On the top of each wave, drop a dollop of whipped cream and add a mint leaf for a sail. **C**

PAUL CHISLETT

The death of a consumer's friend



Margaret Holgate is a consumer economist and free-lance writer-broadcaster

by Margaret Holgate

In July, 1983, the Nova Scotia Branch of the Consumers' Association of Canada established the Consumer Education Centre in Halifax, with the help of funds from the federal department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. The centre is run primarily by volunteers who developed a specialized consumer information library with a detailed index of consumer products and issues. It was a rather unique experiment. By delivering information by phone, quickly and at no charge, the association wanted to see if it could encourage more consumers to forego the consumer lottery approach to buying products and services, in favor of more informed decision making.

Sharon Freeman, the centre's coordinator, was encouraged to find that, while the staff handled many complaints

the bulk of the callers requested pre-purchase information. A toll-free line extended service to callers in rural areas of the province who were far from public libraries and government offices. Out-of-town calls accounted for as much as 25 per cent of the centre's business until the link was withdrawn in November, 1984.

The usefulness of this service is emphasized by the number of patrons whose inquiries had not been satisfied by various government departments or the Better Business Bureau.

Cathy MacNutt, deputy minister of Consumer Affairs for the province, acknowledges that the relationship between her department and the centre is a complementary one. "Our people are often too busy with complaints and matters relating to legislation to offer as much help as we would like in the way of product information or comparison shopping. It's useful to be able to refer requests to an organization that sees consumer education as one of its responsibilities," she says.

Unfortunately, the Consumer Education Centre, along with other consumer projects across the country funded by Consumer and Corporate Affairs, has had its financial support withdrawn and must close its doors at the end of December.

It should come as no surprise. The attitude of government has always been that consumer programs are a luxury. All it needs is a hint of a recession and consumer affairs are among the first to be cut back. This time though, there is increased cause for concern. Alarm bells should sound when a satisfactory answer cannot be found to the simple question: who is left to look after the consumer's interest?

We have come to rely on government enforcement of an intricate network of standards, regulations and inspections to reduce the risk involved in our dealings with the marketplace. But over the last few years it has become ob-

vious that such confidence is misplaced.

Consumer groups have always complained that government subjugates their interest to those of business. At no time was this more evident than in September, when it was revealed that a million cans of tainted tuna fish, previously judged unfit for human consumption by government inspectors, had been released to market earlier in the year. In overturning the decision of his own inspectors, former federal fisheries minister John Fraser blatantly ignored his responsibility to the Canadian consumer in favor of the producer's and his own political interests.

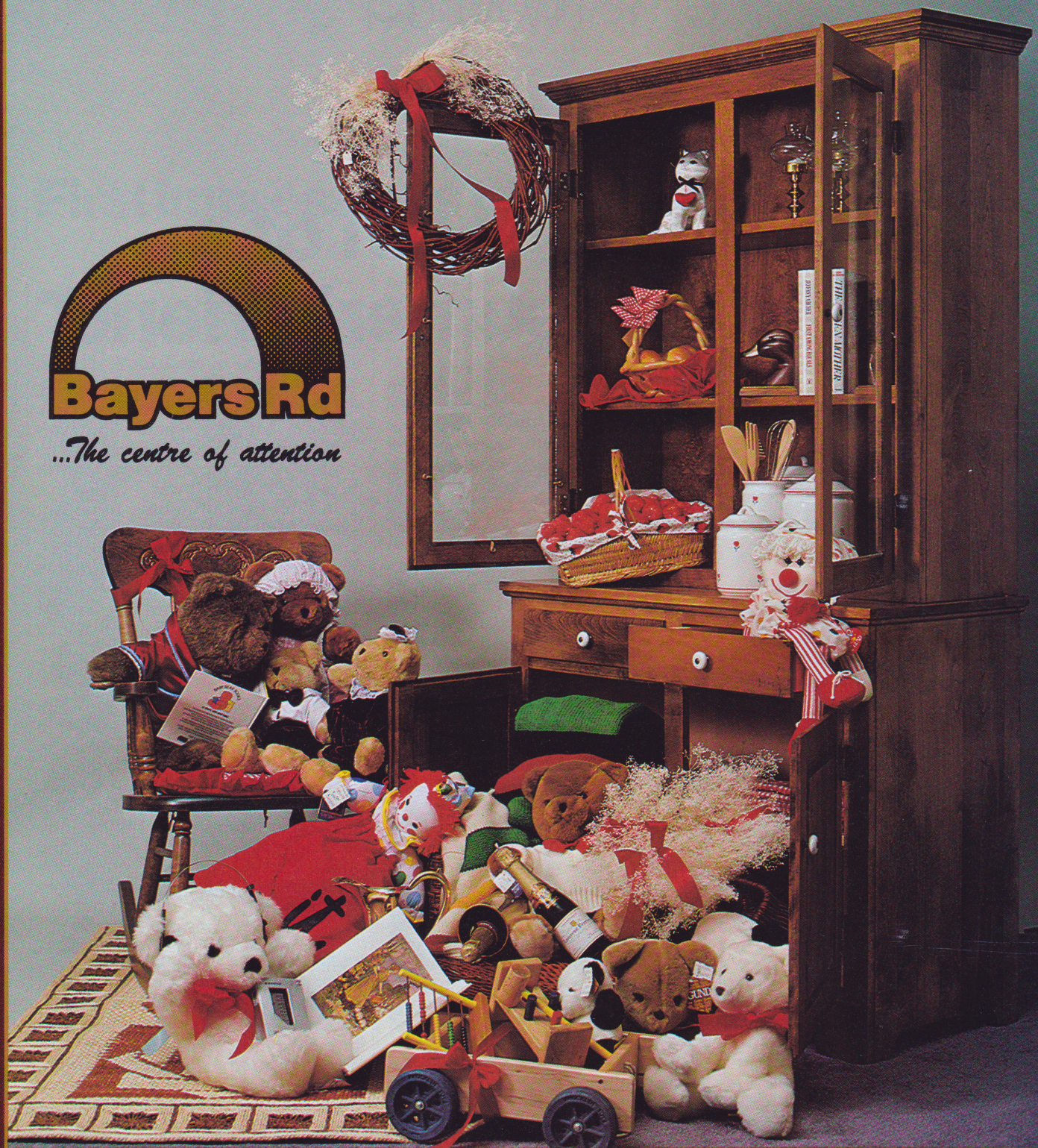
The federal government has responded to complaints of conflict of interest in its handling of consumer affairs over the past few years by increasing grants and contributions to non-profit consumer groups to represent their own interests. By significantly reducing support to these groups, and in some cases removing it entirely, the government is now decimating the only remaining groups which act unequivocally as consumer watchdogs.

The loss of the Consumer Education Centre heralds the resurgence of that old rule of the marketplace: "caveat emptor." The rancid tuna offered poor value for money, and offended the sensibilities of those who purchased it. But, it is argued, it posed no threat to human life. Perhaps this is as clear an indication of the trend in consumer policy as we can expect: "if it doesn't kill you, or kills so slowly you hardly notice it, there is no cause for complaint." Problems directly related to consumer legislation, once they have already occurred will likely receive attention, but for those initial decisions to purchase you are very much on your own.

With the festive season fast approaching may I suggest that ouija boards or dice be added to your list of stocking stuffers? They may soon offer as effective a method as any other for making consumer decisions. **c**

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